Canadian postal network can be national green machine

The Toronto Star

October 11, 2018 Thursday

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Section: OPINION; Pg. A15

Length: 706 words

Byline: Mike Palecek, Brenda McAuley and Avi Lewis

Body

This week, the world's leading climate scientists laid it on the line: catastrophic warming will rip our societies apart, sooner than anyone imagined, unless we transform our economy and industries at lightning speed.

Yes, it's terrifying. But this alarm bell could also catalyze a leap - to a climate and jobs policy that actually meets the measure of this historic moment, and builds a better future for all. First, we need to move beyond the failed incrementalism of our current approach. The climate deal that Ottawa negotiated with the provinces was never anywhere near ambitious enough to meet our Paris commitments. And now the political right is waging war on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's centrepiece carbon tax - which, according to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is way too low to do the job.

But what if we acted as if the climate crisis was an emergency? As if our lives depended on a rapid transition to renewables and a public sphere capable of protecting all of us from the coming storms? We'd bring every resource, every worker, all of our ingenuity and creativity to bear on solutions that would launch this great transition; policies that would unleash a rapid energy transition while catalyzing large numbers of truly green jobs - prioritizing those who need work the most. And that's exactly what Canada's postal workers are doing.

That's right - you may only see postal workers in the news during labour conflicts (and CUPW is, right now, in a high stakes negotiation with strike action authorized.) But the fact is that Canada's postal workers are not only advancing genuine climate solutions, but putting them squarely on the bargaining table.

On Leap Day in 2016, the three of us were in Ottawa to launch a bold proposal called Delivering Community Power - a vision of the post office as the hub of economic and energy transition in Canada. CUPW has advanced key planks of the plan in its negotiations with Canada Post, and the CPAA, the union representing over 8,000 postmasters and assistants in more than 3,000 rural post offices, is an enthusiastic partner.

Here's the pitch. The post office is the largest retail and logistics network in Canada: there are more post offices across the country than Tim Hortons. It also boasts the largest vehicle fleet. Greening Canada Post would have an immediate national impact - and could do far more as concrete climate policy than any of the backroom bartering the government has failed at so far.

If CUPW succeeds in embedding this vision in its next contract, picture this scenario, which could be realized in a few short years: you walk into your local post office, where the roof is covered with solar panels. Outside, electric cars are lined up at a public, high-speed charging station. Among them is a made-in-Canada electric postal delivery van (read: new shifts at auto plants, new jobs for autoworkers.)

Inside, you can still mail a package of holiday goodies, but you can also open a bank account, thanks to the return of financial services at the post office (another flagship demand from postal unions.) This publicly owned bank would chase payday lenders from low-income and rural communities even as it becomes a hub for financing

renewable energy co-operatives in Indigenous communities and other areas where clean public power is not on offer.

And that's not all a clean, green 21st-century public service can offer. As banking services increase revenue for Canada Post, postal workers can build on postal practices in other countries by checking in on seniors, delivering more medicine, even helping to get local agricultural products to local consumers.

This is not a dream: it is an integrated, self-financing package of concrete solutions. When it comes to climate action, the Trudeau Liberals have produced a lot of political hot air, while emissions continue to soar. But there are solutions and bold leadership out there - they're coming from workers. Public workers. Postal workers. And they can work.

Mike Palecek is the national president of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

Brenda McAuley is the national president of the Canadian Postmasters and Assistants Association.

Avi Lewis is the strategic director of the Leap.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: COLUMN

Publication-Type: NEWSPAPER

Subject: CLIMATE CHANGE (91%); CLIMATE CHANGE REGULATION & POLICY (90%); CLIMATOLOGY (90%); SOCIETY, SOCIAL ASSISTANCE & LIFESTYLE (90%); LABOR UNIONS (87%); REPORTS, REVIEWS & SECTIONS (79%); CLIMATE ACTION (78%); EARTH & ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCE (78%); ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION & POLICY (78%); ENVIRONMENTALISM (78%); GREEN ECONOMY (78%); NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS (78%); SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION (78%); ELECTRIC VEHICLE INDUSTRY (77%); STRIKES (76%); LABOR DISPUTES & NEGOTIATIONS (75%); HEADS OF STATE & GOVERNMENT (73%); PRIME MINISTERS (69%); UNITED NATIONS (69%); ELECTRIC MOBILITY (63%); ELECTRIC VEHICLES (60%); EDITORIALS & OPINIONS (59%); CARBON TAX (54%)

Company: TIM HORTONS INC (58%)

Industry: NAICS722513 LIMITED-SERVICE RESTAURANTS (58%); SIC5812 EATING PLACES (58%); ALTERNATIVE & RENEWABLE ENERGY (78%); ENERGY & UTILITIES (78%); GREEN ECONOMY (78%); SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION (78%); ELECTRIC VEHICLE INDUSTRY (77%); RETAIL & WHOLESALE TRADE (72%); SOLAR ENERGY (72%); ELECTRIC MOBILITY (63%); ELECTRIC VEHICLES (60%); MOTOR VEHICLES (60%); CARBON TAX (54%)

Person: JUSTIN TRUDEAU (79%)

Geographic: OTTAWA, ON, CANADA (91%); CANADA (97%)

Load-Date: October 11, 2018

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